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ABSTRACT

A study examined teachers' familiarity with selected multi-ethnic literature and their use of it in literature-based classrooms. A questionnaire surveyed 50 elementary teachers of whom 30 were from a K-5 inner city elementary school with a literature-based reading program, and 20 were classroom teachers completing requirements for a graduate degree in reading or library science. The survey instrument was constructed from a variety of genres, such as poetry, picture books, and biographies, and titles were subsumed under the following headings: Asian-American, Jewish-American, African-American, Native-American, and Hispanic-American. Teachers responded to each title by circling statements on a Likert-type scale numbered from 1 to 6 indicating whether they: (1) had used this material in the classroom in group instruction; (2) had recommended it for recreational reading; (3) had recommended it for research, reference, or resource; (4) had used it as read-aloud by the teacher; (5) were familiar with the title but had not used the book; and (6) were not familiar with the book. Results showed that the majority of teachers in the study were not familiar with multi-ethnic literature, with the exception of a limited number of African-American titles. Uses of the books were mainly limited to the "recreational reading" and "read aloud" categories. (Six tables of data are included. Appendixes contain the survey instrument and five lists of selected children's multi-ethnic literature in the various ethnic categories.) (SR)

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Assessing Teachers' Knowledge of Multi-ethnic Literature

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RUNNING HEAD: MULTI-ETHNIC LITERATURE

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Assessing Teachers' Knowledge of Multi-ethnic Literature

As America's schools prepare for the 21st century, major changes in pedagogy and philosophy of the teaching of reading are emerging. In addition, demographic data suggest that the ethnic composition of our classrooms is also changing. First, more and more school districts are replacing (or supplementing) their traditional basal reading programs with trade books from a variety of genres-- e.g., poetry, realistic fiction, information, etc. Secondly, students of color-- African-American, Asian American, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans--are the most rapidly growing segment of the nation's urban school population. As the country becomes more ethnically varied (by the year 2000, one in three Americans will be a person of color [Banks, 1991; Trueba, 1989; Usdan, 1984]), so too will the public schools. Teachers must be able to deliver quality literacy instruction grounded in a body of literature that will be meaningful to diverse groups of students.

Multi-ethnic Children's Literature: A Look Back

Over the years, the population of characters in children's books has been less than representative of the racial and ethnic makeup of America. Metaphorically, America has proudly referred to herself as being a "melting pot." This quaint Eurocentric term has been traced to a playwright who viewed America as a "God's crucible...for all races of Europe..." (Tiedt and Tiedt, 1990 p. 7).

For years, children's literature perpetuated the portrait of America as a melting pot for European races without being challenged. However, Nancy Larrick shattered this portrayal with her landmark article in the September 11, 1965 issue of Saturday Review. In that article, "The All-White World of Children's Books," Larrick noted that publishers of children's literature had participated in a cultural lobotomy on the country, and in conjunction with children's authors, had excluded blacks from visibility in history and literature in order to make them appear as "rootless" people (Larrick, 1965).

With the civil rights movement at its height in the mid-60s and its attendant legislation, a demand grew for literature written about and by different ethnic groups, especially blacks. Accordingly, publishers flooded the market with books purporting to reflect the black experience. In the 70s, the feminist movement served as a springboard for more accurate portrayals of women within and without the home (Foster, 1987). There was a sudden deluge of books on the market that spotlighted women or blacks or other ethnic groups. However, quantity did not necessarily mean quality.

Unfortunately, the advances made in the 60s and 70s have, for the most part, been slowed and/or reversed. Huck (1987) attributes this retrogressive move to three factors:

1) The insistence of the Council on Interracial Books for Children

that only a person of a particular ethnic background can write about the experiences of that ethnic group, i.e., African Americans write about African Americans, Asians about Asians, etc.

2) The cut in school funds--schools are traditionally the largest market for books about minorities.

3) The move toward conservatism nationally and within the publishing world.

Multi-ethnic literature: What it is, what it does

Norton (1991) defines multi-ethnic literature as :

> "...literature about racial or ethnic minority groups that are culturally and socially different from the white Anglo-Saxon majority in the United States, whose largely middle-class values and customs are most represented in American literature....It is usually viewed as literature about African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Native-Americans." (p.531)

Children's literature is a highly efficient vehicle for helping children understand themselves and the world around them. It has been referred to as the red blood of any language arts curriculum, as it carries the "oxygen" for all language experiences (Hennings, 1990). In that same vein, "multi-ethnic children's literature mirrors and validates" the experiences for children of color and "juxtaposes the familiar with the less familiar" for mainstream children (Cox and Galda, 1990). Multi-ethnic literature reflects the values and traditions emerging from those cultures

Multi-ethnic literature can be a potent force in the socialization, acculturation, and personal and moral development of children (Cullinan, 1989).

There are numerous reasons for using multi-ethnic literature. The values that are derived from reading literature in general hold true for reading multi-ethnic literature. Bishop (1987) lists three understandings about a multi-cultural society that are realized through the use of literature in general, and multi-ethnic specifically:

1) readers can connect to others' experiences common to all our emotions, needs, and desires.
2) readers can understand and learn to appreciate and celebrate the differences among us.
3) readers can, through literature, develop an understanding of the effect of social issues and forces on the lives of ordinary individuals, (p. 60-61).

Furthermore, research shows that the use of multi-ethnic literature enhanced the reading comprehension and problem solving skills of all children (Foster, 1987). Multi-ethnic literature can empower young readers. Being exposed to divergent thought and language patterns, value systems, and ways of living can sharpen sensitivities to the differences and similarities of us all. (Matsujama and Jensen, 1990).

Such is an objective for teaching but how can teacher educators promote that objective if they are unfamiliar with multi-

ethnic choices of literature? Thus, we began this investigation by asking a basic question: Are teachers familiar with multi-ethnic literature, and if so, how is it used in the classrooms that are touted to be "literature-based"?

METHOD

Instrumentation

A survey of teachers' knowledge of selected multi-ethnic children's literature was constructed from a variety of genres, e.g., poetry, picture books, biographies, etc. The titles were culled from numerous sources including The Reading Teacher, Language Arts, The Horn Book and texts by Cullinan, Huck et al., and Norton. The selections were subsumed under the following headings: Asian-American, Jewish-American, African-American, Native-American and Hispanic-American. Teachers responded to the titles under these headings by circling statements on a likert-type scale numbered from 1-6 (See Appendix A.):

1) have used in classroom in group instruction.
2) have recommended for recreational reading.
3) have recommended for research, reference, or resource.
4) have used as read-aloud by teacher.
5) are familiar with title but have not used the book in my classroom.
6) Not aware of the book.

In responses 1-4, teachers were instructed to circle all choices

that were applicable. Thus on many titles, there may have been more than one response circled.

Subjects

Fifty elementary teachers were the subjects of this investigation. Thirty of these teachers were from a K-5 inner city elementary school with a literature-based reading program. The remaining twenty were classroom teachers teachers completing requirements for the Masters in Reading or Library Science at Old Dominion University.

Results

Frequency of use for each title was compiled according to ethnic category.

Insert Table 1 about here.

Of the six categories, "familiarity with" garnered the most responses.

Knowledge by Ethnic Categories

Further analysis of the responses revealed that this sample of teachers had a broader knowledge of African American literature than any other ethnic category. Table 2 reveals that of the 58 African American titles, eleven drew the majority of the responses.

Insert Table 2 about here.

Of the 37 Asian American titles listed, five titles were the most used with 1956's Caldecott Honor Book Crow Boy receiving the most responses.

Insert Table 3 about here.

Three of the nineteen titles in the Jewish American category drew the most responses. Two were related to Chanukkah and the third was a Yiddish folk tale.

Insert Table 4 about here.

The Native American and Hispanic American titles drew the fewest positive responses. Two of the thirty-three Native American titles were used frequently. Only one of the Hispanic American titles, the 1954 Newbery winner And Now Miguel, was used frequently. These two categories also had more titles not recognized by any of the teachers, four (Native American) and sixteen (Hispanic American) respectively. Especially disconcerting is the lack of knowledge of Hispanic literature, in

that Hispanics represent the fastest growing segment of our population.

Insert Table 5 about here.

The category "not aware of book" drew the largest number of responses, thus indicating a general lack of knowledge of multi-ethnic literature for children.

Insert Table 6 about here.

Conclusion

The majority of the teachers that participated in this study were not familiar with multi-ethnic literature with the exception of a limited number of African American titles. Even with a degree of familiarity, uses of the books were mainly limited to the "recreational reading" and "read aloud" categories.

Many teachers themselves have reported that they need further training in implementing a literature based approach to reading/language arts instruction. This study indicates that they are not familiar with children's literature that reflects the country's cultural diversity. It is hoped that the development of this survey will be phase one of the initiation of specialized

training for classroom teachers to successfully incorporate multi-ethnic literature into the curriculum. The authors are currently engaged in staff development activities designed to promote teacher awareness of the rich genra of literature that can further acquaint children with our country's heritage and diversity.

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Tiedt, P.L. and Tiedt, I.M. (1990). Multicultural teaching: A handbook of activities, information, and resources. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Trueba, H.T. (1989). Raising silent voices: Educating the linguistic minorities for the 21st century. Cambridge, MA: Newbury House Publishers.

Usdan, M. (1984). New trends in urban demography. Education and Urban Society, 16 (4), 399-414.

Appendix A

Use the following code to respond to your use or familiarity with the following books. Circle the appropriate number(s). On some titles, you may circle more than one number.

1. Have used in classroom in group instruction.
2. Have recommended for recreational reading.
3. Have recommended for research, reference, or resource.
4. Have used as read-aloud by teacher.

   NOTE: You may have done two or three of the above. If, so, please circle all appropriate responses.

5. Are familiar with title but have not used the book in my classroom.
6. Not aware of the book.

I. **Asian American Children's Literature**

Tye May and the Magic Brush	1	2	3	4	5	6
Sunset in a Spider Web: Sijo Poetry of Ancient Korea	1	2	3	4	5	6
Cricket Songs: Japanese Haiku	1	2	3	4	5	6
Commodore Perry in the Land of the Shogun	1	2	3	4	5	6
The House of Sixty Fathers	1	2	3	4	5	6
A Chinese Zoo: Fables and Proverbs	1	2	3	4	5	6
Dragon Kites and Dragonflies: A Collection of Chinese Nursery Rhymes	1	2	3	4	5	6
Toad is the Uncle of Heaven: A Vietnamese Folk Tale	1	2	3	4	5	6

Miracles: Poems by Children of the English Speaking World	1	2	3	4	5	6
There are two Lives: Poems by Children of Japan	1	2	3	4	5	6
In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson	1	2	3	4	5	6
Yeh-Shen: A Cindrella Story from China	1	2	3	4	5	6

Table 1

Combined Responses to Multi-ethnic Titles

	1	2	3	4	5
Asian American	29	21	06	39	106
Jewish American	12	03	10	11	57
Native American	29	18	13	22	57
African American	89	74	45	94	244
Hispanic American	09	04	08	06	49

Table 2

African American Titles in Decending Order of Familiarity

Tales of Uncle Remus

The Patchwork Quilt

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

John Henry: An American Legend

Jump! The Adventures of Brer Rabbit

More Tales of Uncle Remus

How Many Spots Does a Leopard Have?

Martin Luther King,Jr. and the Freedom Movement

Frederick Douglass: Freedom Fighter

Go Free or Die: A Story of Harriet Tubman

Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters

Table 3

Asian American Titles in Decending Order of Familiarity

Crow Boy
The Emperor and the Kite
Cricket Songs
Master Puppeteer
Sign of the Chrysanthemum

Table 4

Jewish American Titles in Descending Order of Familiarity

The Chunakkuh Tree
It Could Always Be Worse
Light Another Candle

Table 5

Native American and Hispanic American Titles

Sign of the Beaver
Her Seven Brothers
And Now Miguel

Table 6

"Not Familiar with Title"* by Ethnic Category

African American	2460
Asian American	1682
Jewish American	845
Native American	1547
Hispanic American	2036

*Formula for calculating totals was Response Categories (6) x Subjects (50) x N titles.

Selected Children's Multi-ethnic Literature

I. Native American Children's Literature

Anderson, B. (1979). Trickster tales from prairie lodgefires. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.

Baker, O. (1981). Where the buffaloes begin. New York: Warne.

Baylor, B. (1975). The desert is theirs. New York: Scribner's.

Bierhorst, J. (1970). The ring in the prairie: A Shawnee legend. New York: Dial.

Bruchac, J. (Ed.) (1983). Songs from the earth on a turtle's back: Contemporary American Indian poetry. New York: Greenfield Review Press.

Cleaver, E. (1985). The enchanted caribou. New York: Atheneum.

Coatsworth, E. & Coatsworth, D. (1980). The adventures of Nanabush: Ojibway Indian stories. New York: Atheneum.

Cohen, C. L. (1988). The mud pony. Illustrated by Shonto Begay. New York: Scholastic.

dePaola, T. (1983). The legend of bluebonnet. New York: Putman.

Esbensen, B. (1988). The star maiden. Boston: Little, Brown.

Freedman, R. (1988). Buffalo hunt. New York: Holiday.

Gobel, P. (1989). Her seven brothers. New York: Bradbury.

Gobel, P. (1983). Star boy. Scarsdale, NY: Bradbury.

Gobel, P. (1989). Beyond the ridge. New York: Bradbury.

Gobel, P. (1984). Buffalo woman. Scarsdale, NY: Bradbury.

Gobel, P. (1988). Ikto mi and the boulder: A Plains Indian story. New York: Orchard.

Grinnell, G.B. (1982). The whistling skeleton: American Indian tales of the super natural. New York: Four Winds.

Hamilton, V. (1988). In the beginning: Creation stories from around the world. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Highwater, J. (1981). Moonsong lullaby. New York. Lothrop, Lee & Shepard.

Highwater, J. (1984). Legend days. New York: Harper & Row.

Highwater, J. (1986). I wear the morning star. New York: Harper & Row.

Hudson, J. (1989). Swe etgrass. New York: Philomel.

Marrin, A. (1984). War clouds in the west: Indians & cavalrymen, 1869-1890. New Yo rk: Atheneum.

Miles, M. (1971). Anni e and the Old One. Boston: Little Brown.

O'Dell, S. (1970). Sin g down the moon. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Red Hawk, R. (1988). A,B,C's: The American Indian way. Sacramento: Sierra Oak Publishing Company.

Robinson, G. (1982). Raven the trickster. New York: Atheneum.

Sneve, V.D.H. (1972). Jimmy Yellow Hawk. New York: Holiday.

Sneve, V.D.H. (1974). When thunder spoke. New York: Holiday.

Sneve, V.D.H. (Selector) (1989). Dancing tepees: Poems of American Indian youth. New York: Holiday.

Speare, E.G. (1983). The sign of the beaver. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Spencer, P.U. (1983). Who speaks for wolf. Austin, TX: Tribe of Two Press.

Steptoe, J. (1984). The story of Jumping Mouse. New York: Mulberry Books.

II. African-American Children's Literature

Adoff, A. (1976). Big sister tells me I'm Black. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Bryan, A. (1980). Beat the story-drum, pum-pum. New York: Atheneum.

Bryan, A. (1977). The dancing granny. New York: Aladdin.

Bryan, A. (1986). Lion and the ostrich chicks. New York: Atheneum.

Bryan, A. (1989). Turtle knows your name. New York: Atheneum.

Carew, J. (1974). The third gift. Boston: Little Brown.

Carew, J. (1980). Children of the sun. Boston: Little Brown.

Clifton, L. (1983). Everett Anderson's good-bye. New York: Holt.

Courlander, H. (1982). The crest and the hide and other African stories of heroes, chiefs, bards, hunters, sorcerers and common people. New York: Coward.

Ferris, J. (1988). Go free or die: A story of Harriet Tubman. Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda.

Flurnoy, V. (1985). The patchwork quilt. Illustrated by Jerry Pickney. New York: Dial.

Giovanni, N. (1985). Spin a soft Black song. (rev. ed.) Illustrated by George Martins. New York: Hill and Wang.

Giovanni, N. (1981). Vacation time. Illustrated by Marisabina Russo. New York: Morrow.

Greenfield, E. (1981). Daydreamers. Pictures by Tom Feelings. New York: Dial.

Greenfield, E. (1974). Sister. New York: Crowell.

Greenfield, E. (1988). Under the Sunday tree. Pictures by Mr. Amos Ferguson. New York: Harper & Row.

Greenfield, E. (1972). Honey, I love. Illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon. New York.

Greenfield, E. (1989). Nathaniel talking. New York: Writers & Readers.

Grifalconi, A. (1986). The village of round and square houses. Boston: Little Brown.

Haley, G. (1970). A story, a story. New York: Atheneum.

Hamilton, V. (1967). Zeely. New York: Macmillan.

Hamilton, V. (1968). The house of Dies Drear. New York: Macmillan.

Hamilton, V. (1985). Junius over far. New York: Harper & Row.

Hamilton, V. (1985). The people could fly: American Black folktales. Illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon. New York: Knopf.

Hamilton, V. (1988). Anthony Burns: The defeat and triumph of a fugitive slave. New York: Knopf.

Hamilton, V. (1989). The bells of Christmas. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Harris, J. (1986). Jump! The adventures of Brier Rabbit (adapted by Parks, V. and Malcolm, J.) San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Harris, J. (1987). Jump again! More adventures of Brier Rabbit. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Howard, E. F. (1989). Chita's Christmas tree. Illustrated by Floyd Cooper. New York: Bradbury Press.

Hurmence, B. (1982). A girl called Boy. New York: Clarion.

Jaquith, P. (1981). Bo Rabbit smart for true: Folktales from the Gullah. New York: Philomel.

Keats, E.J. (1965). John Henry: An American legend. New York: Pantheon.

Knutson, B. (1987). Why the crab has no head. Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda.

Langstaff, J. (1987). What a morning! The Christmas story in Black spirituals. New York: Macmillan.

Lester, J. (1987). The tales of Uncle Remus: The adventures of Brier Rabbit. New York: Dial.

Lester J. (1988). More tales of Uncle Remus: Further adventures of Brier Rabbit, his friends, enemies, and others. New York: Dial.

Lester, J. (1989). How many spots does a leopard have? and other tales. New York: Scholastic.

Little, L. (1988). Children of long ago. New York: Philomel.

McKissack, P. (1986). Flossie & the fox. Illustrated by Rachel Isadora. New York: Dial.

McKissack, P. (1988). Mirandy and Brother wind. Illustrated by Jerry Pickney. New York: Alfred Knopf.

McKissack, P. & McKissack, F. (1989). A long hard journey: The story of the Pulman porter. New York: Walker.

Mathis, S. (1975). The hundred penny box. Illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon. New York: Viking.

Meltzer, M. (1984). The Black Americans: A history of their own words. New York: Crowell.

Mendez, P. (1989). The Black snowman. Illustrated by Carole Byard. New York: Scholastic.

Mitchell, B. (1986). Shoes for everyone: A story about Jan Matzielger. Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda.

Myers, W. D. (1988). Scorpions. New York: Harper & Row.

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San Souici, R. (1989). The talking eggs: A folktale from the American South. Illustrated by Jerry Pickney. New York: Dial.

Stanley, E. and Vennema, P. (1988). Shaka: King of the Zulus. Illustrated by Diane Stanely. New York: Morrow Junior Books.

Steptoe, J. (1987). Mufaro's beautiful daughters: An African tale. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard.

Steptoe, J. (1969). Stevie. New York: Trophy Books.

Stolz, M. (1988). Storm in the night. Illustrated by Pat Cummings. New York: Harper & Row.

Taylor, M. (1976). Roll of thunder, hear my cry. New York: Dial.

Taylor, M. (1987). The friendship. Pictures by Max Ginsburg. New York: Dial Books.

Taylor, M. (1981). Let the circle be unbroken. New York: Dial.

Taylor, M. (1987). The gold Cadillac. New York: Dial.

Tobias, T. (1975). Arthur Mitchell. New York: Crowell.

Walter, M.P. (1986). Justin and the best biscuits in the world. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard.

Williams, J. (1988). Follow the drinking gourd. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

III. Hispanic-American Children's Literature

Aardema, V. (1979). The riddle of the drum: A tale from Tizapan, Mexico. New York: Four Winds.

Ashabranner, B. (1986). Children of the Maya: A Guatemalan Indian odyssey. New York: Dodd, Mead.

Beals, C. (1970). Stories told by the Aztecs: Before the Spaniards came. New York: Abelard-Schuman.

Beatty, P. (1981). Lupita Manana. New York: Morrow.

Belpre, P. (1973). Once in Puerto Rico. New York: Warne.

Belpre, P. (1978). The rainbow-colored horse. New York: Warne.

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Burland, C. (1980). An Aztec town. London: Hutchinson.

Cisneros, S. (1983). The house on Mango Street. Houston: TX: Arte Publico.

Clark, A.N. (1975). Year walk. New York: Viking.

De Gerez, T. (1981). My song is a piece of jade. Boston: Little, Brown.

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Finger, C. (1924). Tales from silver lands. New York: Doubleday.

Gregory Maestasm J., & Anaya, R.A. (1980). Cuentos: Tales from the Hispanic Southwest. Santa Fe, NM: Museum of New Mexico.

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Hinojosa, F. (1984). The old lady who ate people. Boston: Little, Brown.

Jagendorf, M.A. & Boogs, R.W. (1960). The king of the mountains: A treasury of Latin American folk stories. New York: Vanguard.

Krumgold, J. (1953). ...And now Miguel. New York: Crowell.

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Martinello, M.L. & Newsmith, S.P. (1979). With Domingo Leal in San Antonio 1734. San Antonio, TX: Institute of Texas Cultures.

Meyer, C. & Gallenkamp, C. (1985). The mystery of the ancient Maya. New York: Atheneum.

Mohr, N. (1979). Felita. New York: Dial.

Mohr, N. (1986). Going home. New York: Dial.

Mora, P. (1984). Chants. Houston, TX: Arte Publico.

O'Dell, S. (1986). The king's fifth. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

O'Dell, S. (1979). The captive. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

O'Dell, S. (1981). Carlota. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

O'Dell, S. (1981). The feathered serpent. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

O'Dell, S. (1983). The amethyst ring. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

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